# THE LEGACY OF BRETON IN A NEW AGE

## The New Surrealists

By Terrance Lindall
July 2005

Over the past couple of years I have noted with pleasure the major shows on surrealism being launched at the Guggenheim, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Academy of Design in New York, as well as the Philadelphia Museum and the Pomadou Centre. They certainly document the subject very well, on the assumption that surrealism died in the 1960', or that only a vestigial group of surrealists still practice, such as Carrington in Mexico. The fact of the matter is that one of the largest and most dynamic art movements world-wide at this time is surreal/visionary.

What do Surrealism, Surreal/conceptual, Visionary, Fantastic, Symbolism, Magic Realism, the Vienna School, Neuve Invention, Outsider, the Macabre, Grotesque, Singulier Art, Characterism and Massurrealism have in common? One can probably spend some time noting the fine differences, but what they have in common is that each evolves from an artistic style inherent the thinking of Andre Breton.

Because In the last few years there has been among my colleagues internationally a dispute about who is really a surrealist as an artist, I decided to make things simple and to include all derivatives of surrealism under the category “Pansurrealism.” It was a logically necessary step to take because: 1) All of these art types aforementioned, evolve out of or are inspired by dream states and the subconscious (Breton), or an autonomous 're-aspecting' of reality, so they have something in common. 2) Class theory in philosophy compels the naming of the class to which these art types belong. 3) Using one term rather than an expression, it is most logical to call the class to which these common art types belong 'Pansurrealism.'" In fact, one could just call them all “surrealists,” but the purists cannot

seem to allow it and the debate would have continued ad infinitum. Hence “Pansurrealism.”

The New International Surrealist Manifesto (NISM) was written in 2003 to support the world’s largest show of living surrealists called “Brave Destiny” at the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center, Brooklyn, N.Y., which expressed a broad notion of surrealism as an artistic style. The show incorporated nearly 500 artists (out of thousands who applied) working on every continent, and it filled the 19th Century French Empire mansion, where it was held, from the basement to the attic. The included artists worked in every media, including installation, performance, new technology, fashion, etc., but mostly in the traditional media of painting and sculpture. It opened with a “Grand Surrealist Costume Ball” to which people, including European nobility, flew in from around the world for the one night event, stopping traffic crossing the Williamsburg Bridge from Manhattan. Nonetheless, the mainstream press did not even mention the event!

At the Ball, photo by Joel Simpson

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I realized then that I had flaunted the fact that there is a major worldwide movement, which the scholars at the major museums and universities had declared to have expired in the 1960's! So why did no writer in the mainstream press cover it? As a writer he or she would have to ignore the show for fear of appearing to be "not very knowledgeable about art history." After all, "surrealism is dead." So it would take a very courageous writer to see what is really there and acknowledge the existence of a movement that "officially" does not exist. I mused that the movement is so large that it cannot be seen. As the saying goes, "They (in this case the academics) could not see the forest for the trees." Also, and I can quite respect the idea that, for the academics, the surrealists from the first half of the 20th century were giants from the great Golden Age of surrealism: Ernst, Magritte, Giorgio de Chirico, Dali, et al.; and to think that surrealism ended with them might seem appropriate and romantically correct as a story line. But ladies & gents, that is not history.

A Mark Twain once said, "The report of my death has been greatly exaggerated," after his obituary appeared in a newspaper. So must we say that the much widely reported death of surrealism in the arts is greatly exaggerated.

Since I have been in touch over the last 30 years with the multitudinous members of this “New International Surrealist Movement” (NISM), a movement which never expired and has a consistent legacy going back to the Golden Age, especially through that contemporary of Salvador Dali, Ernst Fuchs, I decided and agreed in 2003 to launch that world’s largest show of artists working in or around the genre. There was an explosion of interest from working artists around the world, who, as Robert Venossa expressed it, represent the world’s “largest invisible art movement.”

Going back to Breton’s Le Manefeste du Surrealisme of 1924 and looking once more at his definition, he defines surrealism as “pure psychic automatism” by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Thought dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside of all moral preoccupations. In it’s purest form in the plastic arts, surrealism would be abstract expressionism. Clement Greenberg recognized this. However, Breton, was most interested in the dream state. The dream is the important central sustaining foundation of what the surreal, visionary and fantastic are about. This is not specifically what the abstract expressionists are offering, but it is what the surreal/visionary and fantastic artists of what I call “The New international Surrealist Movement”) NISM. are pursuing in their art.

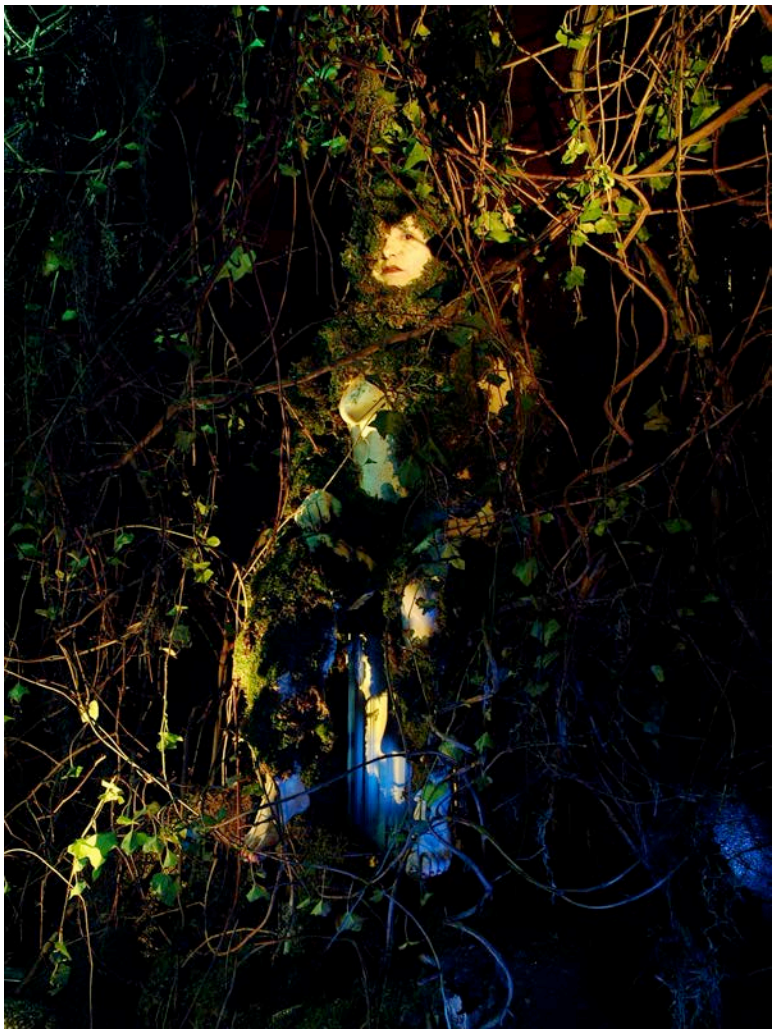
How important are dream states to the human condition? If man’s intellectual and emotional response to innovation and the envisioning of possibilities are important, then dreams, which are free wheeling manifestations of possibility, based indeed upon the waking experiences of the individual, are important. And it is this centrality of Breton’s around which the aforementioned Pansurrealistic artistic styles revolve.

In the show Brave Destiny there was a preponderance of excellence of draughtsmanship and composition. This is a tradition that has been disparaged in the recent past by the nonrepresentational artists and their champions, especially of the New York school. The influence of the New York School resulted in the lack of representation in galleries of masters of traditional surrealist oil painting in the recent decades, so visitors to Brave Destiny were astounded that there were artists of such skill out there. The particular lack of traditional masters of oil is perhaps indicated by prejudices that have grown since the 1960’s in

the universities and art schools. A former Head of an art department at a major university told me that abstract art was “the final culmination of art.” He was of course himself an abstract expressionist. He should have known that artists like Pollock, according to one their great expostulators, Clement Greenberg, “…wanted to model and shade and he found out he couldn't. It didn't come out good. He had to go flat relatively. Nobody wants to paint flat pictures, it's tougher to make them good... “*

Artists such as like Salvador Dali and his great living contemporary Ernst Fuchs were indeed masters of the craft of painting. Ernst carried his evolution of this mastery of painting to the point wherein he claimed to have rediscovered the 16th century techniques of the high renaissance masters - the Mische technique. Today he teaches this technique and has a number of followers including Brigid Marlin, who was one of the founders of a large British membership organization called the Society for Art of the Imagination, which serves as a banked fire to preserve painting as a great craft. They did not call themselves “surrealists,” I believe, because their interest was in their art, not the Trotsky/Marxist social revolutionary ideas with which surrealism had been besmirched in the first half of the 20th century and which especially in the latter part of this century has proven to be a failed idea and lost cause. The Society for Art of the Imagination’s honorary members include some outstanding artists such as H. R. Giger, one of the world’s foremost artists of Fantastic Realism and Academy Award winner for the designs of the title character and its otherworldly environment in the film “Alien,” and also, of course, their aging hero Ernst Fuchs. Many of their other members are outstanding artists, but they also have many of a more ordinary talent who strive nonetheless to achieve high standards.

In the latter part of the 20th century, installation art has become an important facet of surrealism as with artists such as “Zen” and Nicol Pilar.



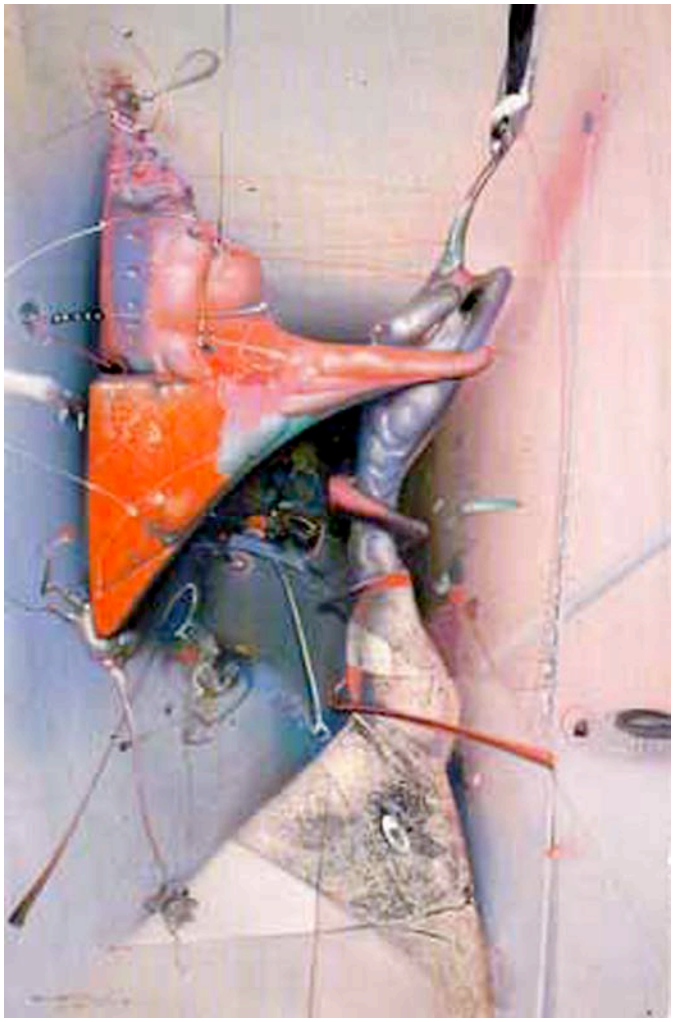
Nicol Pilar installation at Dabora Gallery

Photography is also now an important expression of the new surrealists. With the advent of computer software to modify digital pictures artists can freely modify imagery. An important international juried show in 2006, “Sun Pictures to Megapixels,” is expected to have a high percentage of surreal imagery.

Joel Simpson Projection Photo “Hausfrau”

For new surrealists in America in the traditional media we have Roberto Venosa. Antanas Adomaitas, Chris Kuksi, Chris Mars, Christina Dallas, Dana Parlier, Umberto Aquino, Tim Slowinsky, Madeline von Foerster Theo Kamecke, Bethany Jean Fancher, Alex Grey, Richard Huck and more of great merit. In Europe, there are Arthur Golacki, Von Strop, De Es Schwertberger, Daniel Hanequand, Hawk Alfredson, Wolfgang Grasse, Jorgan Mahler Elbang, to name a few of many. In Russia, Dmitri Yakovin and Victor Zinuhov, Michael Cheval, Boris Ivanov, Sofia Baturina, Dmitry Pahomov, Dmitry Yakovin. In Columbia Mariu Suarez. In the Philippines the young master Bienvenido “Bones” Banez, In Australia in the last two years there has been a major surreal/visionary museum traveling show

sponsored by Damien Michaels, publisher of the lavish Artvisionary Magazine, himself a master artist of the genre.

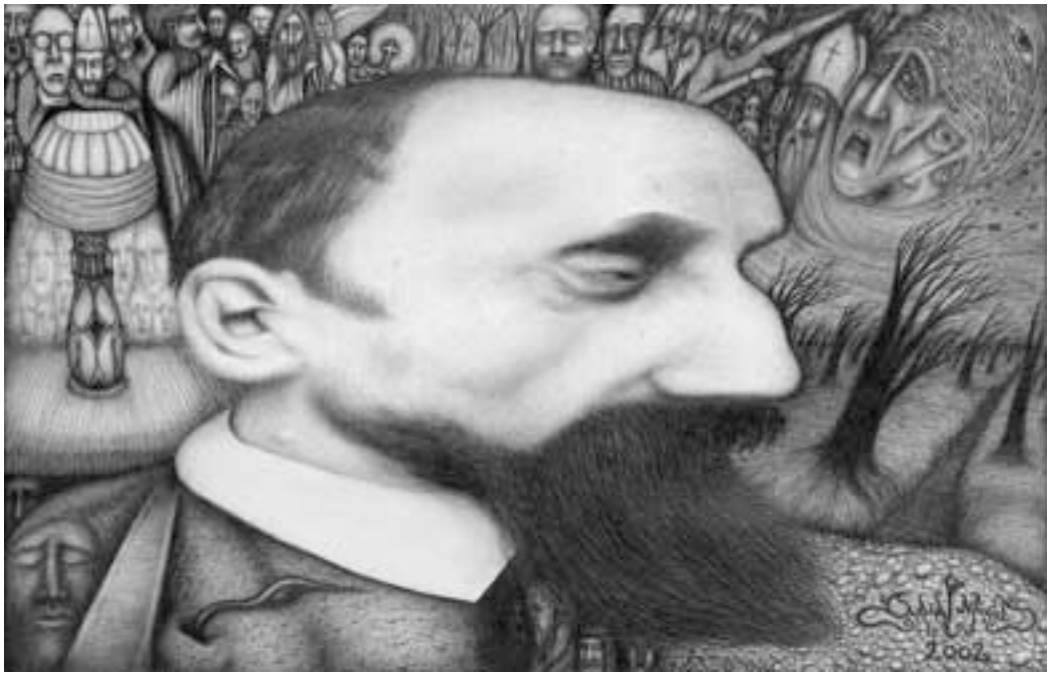


Adomaitis

Madeline von Foerster

Christina Dallas

Tim Slowinski

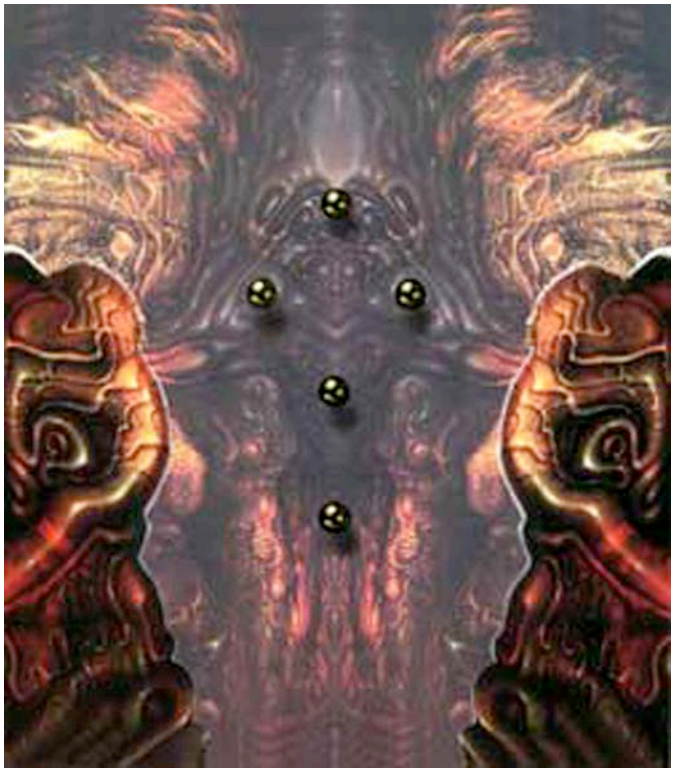


Damien Michaels

H.R.Giger

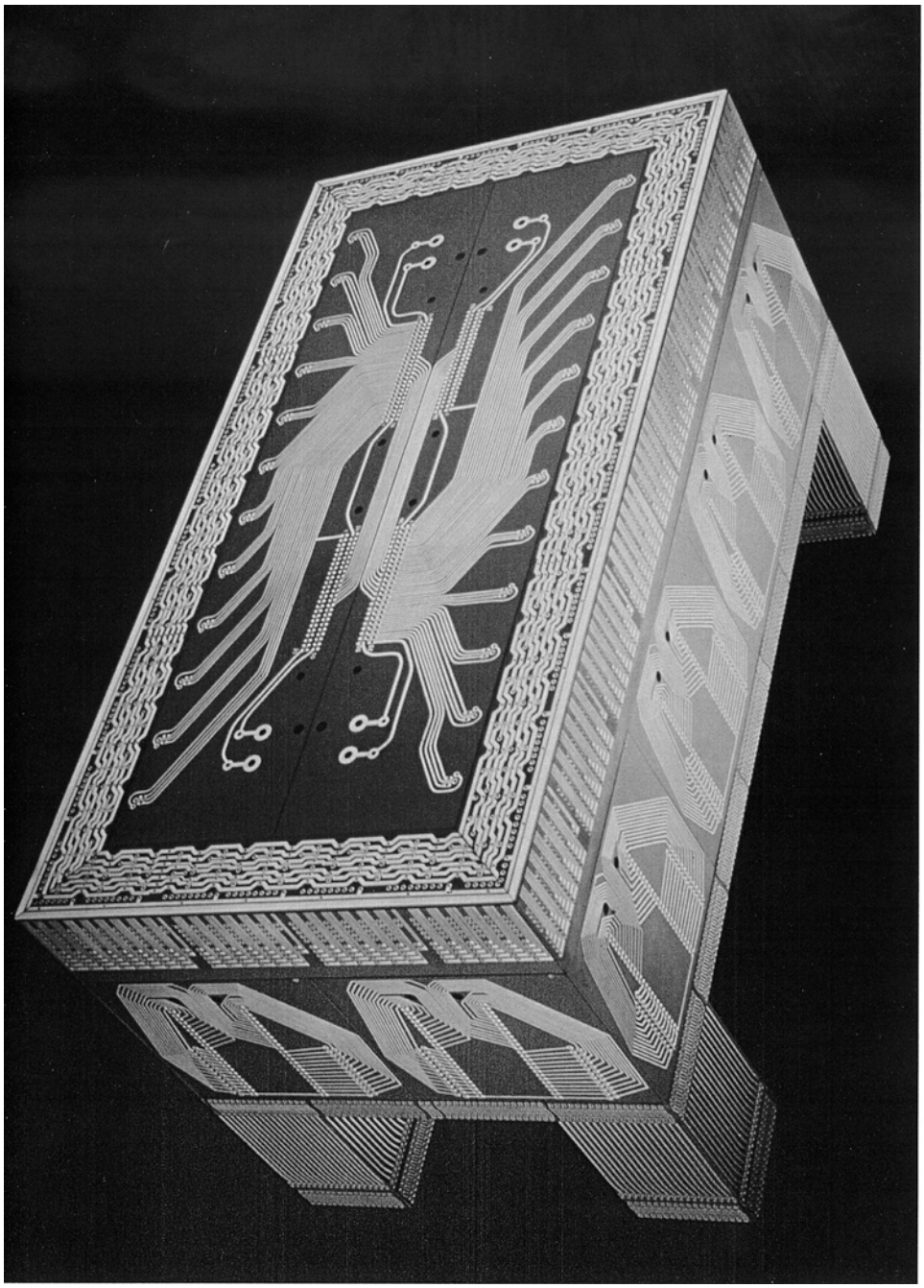
Cynthia “The Countess” von Buhler

Bethany Jean Fancher



Robert Venossa

Jeff Daiss



Theo Kamecke

Why are artists coming back to traditional skill in oil in surrealism? Many, of course, never left the movement, although they have not been encouraged by the commercial mainstream which looks to the auction for its cues to what is “important.” It is simply a fact of the human condition that the Kudzo plant of craftless “in your face art” of the postmodern world with its easy production is becoming somewhat stale. Money does indeed prop it up. Huge investments have been made by museums supported by wealthy collectors in the last 40 years. And the auction game has created a gambling scenario

reminding one of Los Vegas. In an age when mastery of technique seems disparaged and the only value a work of art seems to have is its price at auction, it is a wonder that so many artists still work in the “old master” surrealist genre... a miracle! The Russians and the Europeans do appreciate this art form and more are discovering its delights every day. Today one can amass a collection of the best of these “new surrealist’s” for prices ranging from $2000 per work up to about $100,000 for top names. Considering how lesser artists of the mainstream command up to a million, these are bargains, indeed.

The influence of surrealism in commercial mass media has been most notable to everyone in the world of comics. In the USA, comics as we know them began to appear in 19th century American Sunday supplements in newspapers, starting with Richard Felton Outcault's 'The Yellow Kid.' Later, Winsor McCay's masterpiece “Little Nemo in Slumberland” appeared, a character who would not seem out of place in any surrealism show.

In Europe, the adult fantasy magazine Metal Hurlant (also known as Heavy Metal in the United States), appearing in the 1970’s, became an outlet for surrealist artists into mass media…artists such as the brilliant Moebius, Rod Kierkegaard, Jr., Druillet, and others. These comics have had a direct influence on artists working today in the commercial worlds of fashion, advertising, video games and the like, as well as the fine arts. As we see, surrealism is alive in contemporary mass culture! And yet some still contend that “surrealism is dead!”

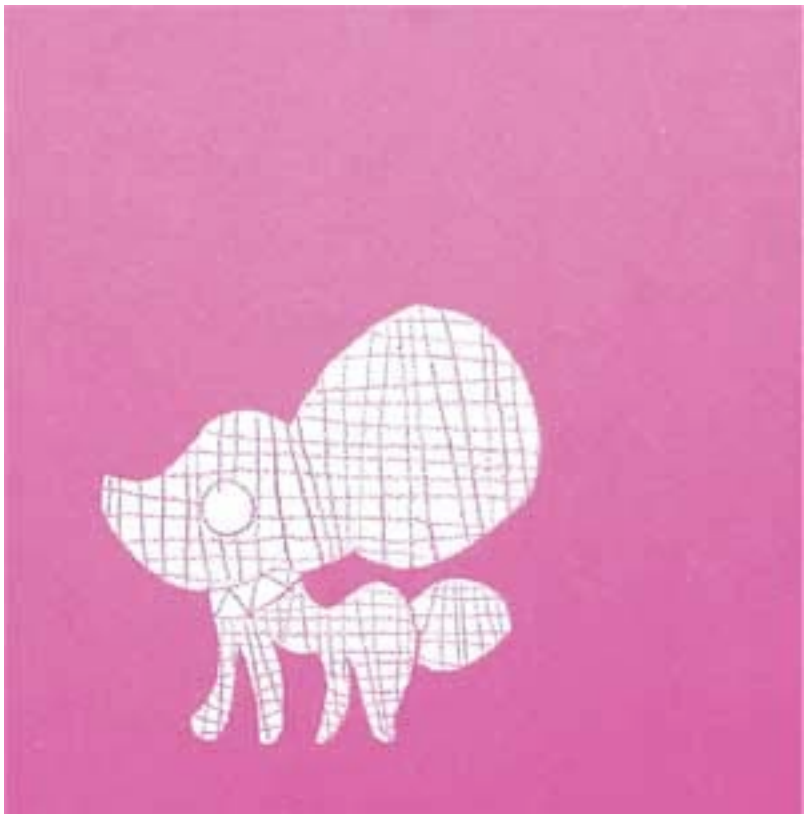
In the late 20th century a new age in Japanese mass surrealism burst forth internationally as a global phenomenon in the contemporary art market initiated by a new generation of artists who are absorbed by pop subcultures. Much the same way as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein were influenced by comics and advertising, many current contemporary artists are incorporating images from a new and international phenomenon of Pop Culture — not only cartoons and comics but cute electronic products like personal minicomputers & telecommunication products such as Hello Kitty cell phones, Sony Aibo and Dream Robot. They were also influenced by characters such as R2D2 in Star Wars, and other movies. The animated film makers Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata began to have broad international influence in the 1970’s. Miyazaki’s themes of magical terrains and nature vs. man, as with his 1984 “Nausicaa of the Valley

of the Wind" and his 1997 film "Princess Mononoke" which was released in the West, influenced these new Pop artists. And also influential was Rumiko Takahashi who got her first fame with a story about a slightly perverted teenage boy and an alien girl who loves him. The first of this new wave of artists were Mariko Mori and Takeshi Murakami from Japan. The tremendous influence of pop subculture of the 60's thru the 90's resulted in a new "pop-surrealist" fine art form called "Characterism," a term coined by Yuko Nii of the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center and Yuko Wylie of Lunarbase Galley, both in Williamsburg Brooklyn, who sponsored in 2003 the first major show of 67 fine artists whose work is based upon these comic mass media art forms. The show was juried by Charlotta Kotik, Chief Curator of Contemporary Art at the Brooklyn Museum. Western Characterism artists included Kelly Newcomer (USA), Chaval (South America) and Sung Soo Kim (Korea) among others. Japanese Characterism artists included Hitomi Aida, Sawako Fuse (SAVAKO), Nakano (VATARU), and many others.

Savako

Chaval

Kelly Newcomer



Hitomi Aida

A new group of surrealist intellectuals have emerged with whom I have been in touch; they are the “Massurrealists,” a term coined by artist James Seehafer in 1992.” They are considered by some to be among the first art movements of the 21st Century. Those who grew up in the 1980's and 1990's witnessed the influence of mass media, advertising, the advent of commercial uses for the web, and personal computing permeating every facet of our lives. Professor Mark Daniel Cohen, writer and art critic, describes their work as follows “Massurrealism is a burgeoning art movement in which artists employ the iconography and technologies of the mass media to achieve the principal aim of authentic Surrealism: a transformation of the state of mind of the viewer so as to initiate a perception of the dream-like truth of reality. In the contemporary world, that truth is the hallucinatory, intimate immediacy of the entire world, focused everywhere at every moment, conducted by the electronic information media - the media of universal instantaneity.”

**Peter Steinlechner**
**Massurrealist**

As Philip P. Kocsis, says in his  Massurrealism and the Concept of RELATIVE REALITY,  “The beauty of Massurrealism is, by its nature, constantly evolving. It lends itself comfortably to absorbing and defining ongoing technological advancements. “

In Williamsburg Brooklyn, the world-renowned trendy artists neighborhood, a form of Massurrealism, WIGGLISM, was posited, expressed as “the ecological and cyborg sensibilities of Williamsburg's multimedia warehouse party culture.” It was based on Ebon Fishers "Nerve Circle" media rituals which go back to his teaching and studying at MIT's Media Lab in the mid-80's. He says, “The essence of the project is to abandon the discourse of "art" (a humanist creature) and redefine cultural activity as an act of creating vital life forms (an ecological & post-humanist creature). Wigglism, as a  democratic expression, flaunts the mainstream commercial money world. In this we see echoes of the socialist egalitarian political roots of the first surrealists, such as Rene Crevel, great friend of André Bretón, staunch enemy of the bourgeois, which led to many frictions and some violence in the early years of surrealism. The Webists offer their work free on the web. The Marxists would have been pleased by this snub of capitalism.

As Ebon notes, much like Kocsis, everything is continually evolving. That is today’s surrealism, like a dream evolving in a reaction to today’s mainstream calcification of a stale postmodernism.

Our New International Surrealists are not only fine artists or web artists but also traditional playwright/songwriters such as Peter Dizozza, much in the tradition of Nobel prize winning Abe Kobo, the Japanese surrealist playwright, author and filmmaker who created the great film ‘Woman in the Dunes.” Dizozza, a new voice in underground theater and filmmaking, and founder of Cinema VII Productions, creates surreal and satirical interpretations of religious magical mystery plays and mythologies, such as his “Prepare to Meet Your Maker,” which I found to be ribald, humorous and very inspired, or social satires such as his recent “Golf Wars.” He is currently writing a surrealist musical based on Milton’s Paradise Lost.

Not to,leave out film, one of the most popular art forms, Dizozza also produces an annual Surrealist film festival. In recent years films such as Amy Greenfield’s "WILDFIRE" (Eclipse Productions), Melanie Panush Lindert's "IN VIVIO" and Lauren Hartman's "PHANT" have

received acclaim by surrealist critics such as Keith Wigdor.

Dizozza's 11th Hour

In dance Butoh is a surrealist expression that was founded in post World War II Japan in 1959 by Kazuo Ono and Hijikata, who trained in Western dance and in the German Neue Tanze tradition. It is a contemporary form of dance that has little to due with either traditional Japanese dances or most western forms of dance. These dancers can leap wildly about with loud music or perform with no soundtrack and have small movements so subtle that at any distance they would appear to move slowly or not at all. The dancer appears to be in a dream state responding to his or her subconscious and expressing the autonomous re-aspecting of reality of Breton's idea. As Dan Hermon, webmaster of Butoh Net says, "… as much as from the mind in a way similar to how a pastry chef uses a paper cone to direct the icing onto a cake." Min Tanaka is currently one of the most influential performers. Butoh Dance now has spread throughout the world.

So the future is open to young surrealist artists with new technology as well as those who stand by the master traditions of the great arts of oil painting, theater, poetry and dance. The "traditionalists" and the "new mediaists" are both strong components among the New International Surrealists, a broad and inclusive social/artistic fabric

spanning the world in every language and on every continent. These are not artists who pander to a market, as Arthur Danto said in Artnews in April 1988, “defined by John Maynard Keynes…” in which, …”drawing must be slack, the application of paint desultory and tacky, and the choice of colors rebarbative.” The true surrealists, as always, are revolutionary and follow their own destiny apart from that of the auction as an “indispensable index of correct choices.” Ultimately surrealism will be vindicated as the foundation of all modern and contemporary art forms, the life elixir, the blood of every artist’s aspiration for new invention in 20th century (and now 21st century) art. As the living foundation for all new ideas I can certainly declare, “surrealism is not dead!”

Today's artists of the surreal/visionary/fantastic genre have two ostensive goals: mastery of technique, whether through writing, paint on canvas, or new technology, and pursuit of the possibilities revealed or envisioned in an evolving spontaneous dream state, as presented in a new concrete representation of the waking state.

The nature of human beings, having curiosity and intellectual inquiry, is to wonder about and analyze our dreams, in the way that Freud inspired the early surrealists. The wonderment of dreams resides in the place where no language can describe the process of creation, destruction and change, a place of unknown mystery, Breton’s Great Mystery! Between the realms of waking and dream, creation & destruction, there is an unknown land. It is that land that Breton wanted to understand. It is that realm that the New Surrealists, the “Pansurrealists” want to make manifest, as much as it is possible to do so.

Surrealism as a revelation of dream states thru art is not new. It goes back to Hieronymus Bosch and probably before. It is more relevant than ever as we reinvent reality to save ourselves from the mundane. And it is one of the most “undead” art forms around.

For a list of surrealist artists, check in the “archives” under “Brave Destiny” at www.wahcenter.net

There are galleries that exhibit surrealist art exclusively. In New York City you might try: CFM Gallery, Interart Gallery (for Russian art), Art at Large, Dabora Gallery (Brooklyn). or Limner Gallery in Phoenicia, New York

* The Edmonton Interview